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Voices of Engaged Scholarship: Relationships & Research in University-Community Project

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Introduction

Researching People not Patterns

"That's an old story. It's a typical pattern! People have complained about invasive researchers for a long time. You can't let that stop you from asking tough questions or really digging into the scene! Tom challenged Deb and gestured emphatically to make his point as he glanced down the long wooden conference table at his classmates.

Deb ran her hand through her sandy hair, leaned forward to look directly at Tom and replied, "It's a very sensitive environment. I'm trying to get them to trust me enough so that I can get access to their volunteers. I can't just intrude on the lives of volunteers without support from the organization. They don't even know me yet." Deb's shoulders slumped and she leaned back in the padded swivel chair with a frown.

Tom quickly reiterated, "What I'm saying is that researchers sometimes hold back, then they don't get all the information. You have to push into the scene. I remember when I …"

Elizabeth could see that Deb was exhausted and frustrated so she decided to interrupt Tom's argumentative comments. "Tom, it might be an 'old story' to you but we have chosen to respect the people at the Center Against Spouse Abuse. It is *their* story and it is *their* choice to share it with us. I see them as collaborators or colleagues not as subjects or even participants, certainly not as patterns or categories. We are trying to develop a relationship with them. I think a relationship means sincerely valuing their concerns about being 'ripped off' by previous researchers!"

"I think we are saying the same thing," Tom replied in a somewhat ambiguous tone, conciliatory but pedantic. It was unusual for Elizabeth to be so emphatic.

"No! You were describing a category, a pattern. I'm talking about people and respect. Look, we plan to be involved in working at the shelter, interviewing and observing for the next year at least. We can get the information but it is on *their* timetable. We must make time to hear the stories and the stories behind the stories."

Deb jumped back into the fray, "Thanks Elizabeth. Right, my problem is getting the paper done for this class, but that's only the start. Its my problem, not theirs. You know at their staff meeting they told us that researchers didn't share their results and they didn't even tell them what grade they got on the paper."

Elizabeth elaborated on Deb's point, "That story is definitely shared throughout the organization. I've heard it several times. They joke about it but there is an undercurrent of bitterness. They feel used. Different staff members have asked us several times if we will continue to be involved after the class or if the grant isn't funded. They are wondering if we will dump them or stick with them." Elizabeth realized that the rest of the class had become very quiet; no papers were being shuffled, no side comments being whispered.

"Ok!" the professor, Carolyn Ellis, smiled broadly and looked around the conference table quickly, "You three have brought up a key point about research and relationships! And the issue of time is critical. There are no short cuts to really good research.

Literature Review

This paper is about engaged scholarship and a university-community initiative as an example of research collaboration. It addresses the negative perceptions community activists hold concerning researchers, the development of the research relationship with the community organization and the reactions of academic researchers within the research team. The paper covers the first four months of developing a partnership between the University of South Florida

(www.usf.edu) and an organization that works against domestic violence, CASA (www.casa-stpete.org). Using narratives, I explore issues such as incentives and barriers for the community agency to collaborate with the university and for university faculty to pursue a research project. Relationships and impressions are the focus of this paper. This paper is an attempt to be reflexive about the process of developing a partnership and to show rather than tell the reader about the process, with the hope that our examples may inspire others to reflect on the process of their projects. The observation of participation and co-production of knowledge (Tedlock, 2000) are particularly important for this project since the community partners were concerned about developing a relationship with researchers and assuring that the research would be conducted with full understanding of the context of domestic violence.

New models of democratic, participatory and reciprocal research relationships are emerging as part of collaboration between universities and communities (Boyer, 1996, Campbell, 1999, Ceglowski, 2000, Goldstein, 2000, Jones, 1998, Papa et al, 2000). These new models require humility, care and equity (Ansley & Gaventa, 1997). Engaged scholarship must be defined as a relationship involving trust and time. It is not just good citizenship but service tied to scholarly work in a field of knowledge (Glassick, Huber & Maeroff, 1997). Engaged scholarship involves action research in the attempt to address a social problem or public policy issue. It requires a difficult balance for the scholar to act as a researcher who is a facilitator, catalyst and resource but not the powerful expert. Both the expertise of the researcher and the community members must be valued (Greenwood, 2000). Social justice principles of empowerment, integration and transformation are essential to avoid hierarchical charity and control (Marullo & Edwards, 2000). Community based action research is ultimately the search for meaning, which moves us away from competitive power driven processes toward more

cooperative ways of living (Stringer, 1996). A series of Kellogg Commission reports outline blueprints for new approaches to academic institutions and teaching. The commission defines engagement as well beyond conventional outreach or public service.

> Our inherited ideas emphasize a one-way process of transferring knowledge and technology from the university (as the source of expertise) to its key constituents. The engagement idea is profoundly different; embedded in it is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity…partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table (W. K. Kellogg 1999, p. 27)

The conversation about changing academic models calls for creating a campus culture of civic engagement. Collaborative partnering has been positioned in the context of institutional change and community development where all partners understand the rewards, challenges and strategies for sustaining such partnerships (Kellet & Goldstein, Boyer, 1999). Collaboration and community building are widely espoused but the fundamental paradigm shifts are difficult to translate into action, not just for academic faculty and students but also for all types of community groups and government agencies. Research into collaboration success factors and practical guides to community building are vital (Mattessich & Monsey 1992, Mattessich, Monsey & Roy 1997, McCook, 2000, Winer & Ray, 1994).

Voice is critical to engaged scholarship and this paper. The CASA community partners are committed to empowering women's voices and want a research partnership that privileged women's narratives. Virginia Olesen (2000) pointed to two major issues in her piece on feminisms, qualitative research and the millennium: (1) avoiding replication of the researcher in favor of displaying the representation of the participants; (2) open interrogation of our own views and practices as researchers, turning the lens on ourselves (235-236). It is with Olesen's challenge and feminist ethics of collaborative design and execution that we undertook the CASA project (Christians, 2000). This article privileges the voices of those who are partners in the community and in the academy. I acknowledge my subjectivity and the process of reciprocity

between partners. I have learned from my partners and been profoundly affected in a very short time (Ellis & Berger, 2002,Gluck & Patai, 1991).

Methodology

This paper is an ethnographic work based on narrative inquiry into the process of developing engaged research relationships. Laurel Richardson's metaphor of crystallization applies to the process of interpretation with reflections of diverse externalities and multiple refractions within ourselves. It results in a deeply complex and thoroughly partial understanding (Richardson).

Participant observation was conducted for four months at several meetings of the partners, a CASA staff meeting, two days of volunteer training, as well as meetings with individuals. I used electronic mail heavily and I made frequent telephone calls to promote the relationship and planning in the first months of the project. I archived all the email messages and made extensive notes during phone conversations. I made several individual visits to the shelter and administrative offices. Visits to the shelter included interactive interviews, as well as informal conversations during lunch and breaks. During the initial visits I did not tape the interviews but I wrote field notes. I taped the interviews with the academic partners. I coded and analyzed all the notes and transcripts.

A portion of the University-Community Initiative (UCI) grant proposal, "Lived Realities and the Meaning of Working Against Domestic Violence: The CASA Story of Stories," is included in the first section of this paper. It was an important decision to use of a narrative to describe the project in terms of significance of the research, methodology and partnership within the university and the community. Since the research method for the project was to be narrative, the grant modeled the type of scholarship to be pursued. It began with a narrative, "Telling the

Whole Story" which described the planning of the partnership. We knew that some of the academic reviewers might not be receptive to this research method or format for the grant request; but we felt it was important to demonstrate the method within the proposal.

The second section of this paper shows how the community partners saw researchers in general and how they perceived us specifically. I asked the question, "With your negative past experiences and your aversion to researchers, why did you let us into your organization?" The executive director and shelter coordinator both eloquently answered this question in a way that can apply to other projects. The third major section of the paper focuses on the academic partners. I asked them, "Why did you chose to participate in the project and how did you see our community partners?" Throughout our conversations I present some of my views as part of the interactive interview. In the conclusion I further present my personal reflections and draw the readers' attention to some emergent themes.

Project Proposal

There were five deliverables clearly outlined in the UCI project proposal: 1.) Establish a collaborative relationship between CASA and USF, and document the process of developing the project as a collaborative university-community partnership; 2.) Conduct an ethnographic study of CASA, emphasizing the ways that staff, volunteers, and former shelter residents tell stories and engage in sense-making in their personal and professional lives; 3.) Study the use of stories by staff and volunteers at CASA to communicate abuse as a social problem and dispel misunderstandings in the wider community; 4.) Assess the feasibility of a Volunteer Program with CASA and the USF Communication and Sociology Departments, and 5.) Result in a booklet of stories to be used locally, statewide, and nationally with victims, scholars, families,

community groups, volunteers and related agencies in reframing domestic violence in our society. These five deliverables and the narrative, "Telling the Whole Story", provide the background for this paper on the development of the collaborative relationship of researchers and the community.

Telling the Whole Story

"Abused women never get to tell their whole story!" Linda Osmundson, the Executive Director of CASA states with passion. We were meeting to explore ideas for collaborative research between CASA and the university. Elizabeth Curry and Deb Walker, two Ph.D. students in Communication; Penny Phillips, an M.A. in Communication; and I, Carolyn Ellis, a professor in Communication, all lean forward eagerly. Our ears perk up as we give Linda our full attention. After all, story telling is what interests us. In our Communication and Sociology studies, we've concentrated on narrative as both a product and method of research.

"The courts and the police want to hear only about the actual incident of physical abuse," Linda continues, "not 15 years of psychological and physical torment. There is so much more. Unfortunately even when women are housed at CASA, the staff only has time and resources to listen to part of the story. Sometimes the women tell us the most disturbing parts of their life stories on the day they leave the shelter. 'My boyfriend killed someone or saw someone kill someone,' one woman said as she was walking out the door, as though she just needed to leave the story behind."

"But the women who work as staff members and volunteers at CASA don't leave their stories behind," Linda says forcefully. "They come here, often survivors of abuse themselves. Their work is a daily reminder of their own stories."

"Do the staff members ever get to tell their stories?" I ask.

"Well, no, not really," she replies, seeming interested by my inquiry. "And that's a need they have—to have someone listen to them."

"Where do we fit in here?" I ask. "How might we help you?"

I can tell by Linda's open-eyed and smiling expression that she likes the unexpected question. "I'm not sure," she says thoughtfully, "but in the past we've felt ripped off because researchers come and do surveys, and then they often don't even share their results. When they do, the results often have little to do with the reality we live. I'm mainly interested in working with people who will take the time to understand what really goes on at CASA. We need research that reflects people's lives, not research that uses insignificant questions and snippets out of context to test somebody's research hypothesis. We need the women's stories from their perspectives told in the context of their whole experience. Something like *Women in the Trees,* a book of short stories about abuse from the 1800s to the 1990s edited by Susan Koppelman." Elizabeth and Deb write down the name of the book.

"We could offer writing workshops," says Deb, "like Carolyn does in the Clemente course.

"We already offer journaling in our support groups for our shelter residents," Linda replies. "We need people to write the stories for us and with us, not add one more job to already overloaded schedules."

"That makes sense," says Elizabeth. "So the CASA story is not just the stories of residents, but also your story and the story of staff and volunteers," Elizabeth continues, summarizing what has been said so far. Linda nods enthusiastically. "What if we constructed a project where Deb and I would participate in CASA activities over an agreed period of time? I'd be particularly interested in staff, their path to becoming staff. Were they abused themselves?

Did they begin as volunteers? I'd want to explore how they cope with their own stories of abuse while working in a context where they hear abuse stories all the time."

"I've been studying volunteers in other programs already," Deb says. "I could concentrate on them. I'm interested in why people become volunteers, how their participation affects their own stories and their families."

"Although I can't participate full-time in the project, I'd like to give my performance on being abused by my former husband, the one I did for Carolyn's methods class," says Penny. "I'd want to focus on how I came, through performance and personal writing, to restructure my story from one where I was a victim to one that highlights the complex interpersonal and performative dynamics between me and my former husband."

"That would be very helpful for staff and shelter residents," Linda replies.

"And I'd be interested in the stories of other women survivors," Penny adds.

"Doni Loseke [USF Sociology Department] has written a book on women's shelters, and I know she is intrigued by the organizational components and policy implications," I add and note that Linda now is leaning toward us with a big smile on her face. "And, of course, I would be willing to coordinate this whole project and provide methodological guidance. Not hypothesis testing," I assure Linda. "We would concentrate on the stories people bring to CASA; the ones they create there; the ones they take away when they leave. We could focus on how they make the experience meaningful. We would work with you to co-construct stories, not just write about you. And Deb and Elizabeth will be in the trenches, volunteering, trying to understand CASA from the inside out. We'd hope to produce evocative stories that give readers a sense of the experience and make them feel some of what goes on there."

"I'd also like to think about creating a product from the experience," Elizabeth adds, "one that would be helpful to the CASA community. Maybe our own *Women in the Trees*, only this one would have stories of staff and volunteers as well as shelter residents."

"This is it!" Linda says, now beaming. "This is what I've been hoping for."

"This really is a collaboration between the community and the university," says Marcie Finkelstein, who has been quietly taking it all in. "It's not just university professors using the community for their own benefit. As Director of the Center for Engaged Scholarship, I have been hoping for a project just like this one."

"Assuming it works," Elizabeth says, "I'd also like to chronicle our collaborative process, perhaps producing a paper that provides a model of successful collaboration between the university and community" (Ellis & Curry)

Community Partners' Views of Researchers

Casa Executive Director: "You get it!"

During our first meeting and subsequent conversations, the Executive Director of CASA, Linda Osmundson expressed strong feelings about researchers who 'ripped off' those they study. After four months, I interviewed her by phone about researchers in general and her decision to work with us specifically. The University Community Initiative grant had not been awarded at the time of this conversation; but I was already involved in class projects with CASA. Linda was on her way to Cypress for an international conference on domestic violence

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"Linda thanks so much for making time to talk with me this afternoon. I know how hectic it can be before going out of town." I visualized Linda's striking presence as her distinctive voice answered the phone. I saw her full figured body dressed in creative colors,

comfortably positioned but intensely alert, with her mass of curly white hair framing her expressive face.

"Oh, at this point I'm as ready as I'll ever be. I'm giving a presentation on the feminist analysis of the United States' shelter system. We have focused so much on shelters and other countries have alternative models. Maybe we need to look at other ways of providing services. Anyway, I'm not an academic. My presentation isn't a paper that I'll read, I just use my notes and an outline." Linda doesn't sound arrogant, but maybe a bit defensive. "Some of the academic papers are so boring and I really want to have a dialogue about this issue. Most of the participants are doctors, lawyers, and academics but there are a few activists. We manage to set up our internal radar and find each other."

I tell her a bit about the presentations on domestic violence research I saw at the National Communication Association; however, I'm cautious because on previous visits Linda and I have launched into open-ended conversations where we easily lost track of time. "Interesting, I hope we can talk more about that when you return. Now I'm going to keep my promise of limiting this call to an hour." Linda laughs. I begin to focus the conversation, "Your comment leads me to our two topics for today: specific examples of problems with academic researchers and why you decided to work with us. I'm trying to write a paper that will help people understand the process of university community collaboration."

"I guess I sound like I don't like academics, but not really. I'm so glad you sent me the story Carolyn wrote about her brother. I started reading it in the office, then took it home to finish reading when I went to bed. That was an example of meaningful and totally engaging research. Academic articles don't matter unless people read the work, can make sense of it or even want to read it, let alone remember it."

“Yes, you know our goal for this project is something that you can use, narratives about your work that will be meaningful! I changed my tone subtly and asked a direct question, "So Linda, you expressed very definite opinions during our first meeting. I was wondering if you would be willing tell me some specific examples of difficulties you or your colleagues have experienced with other researchers?"

"First of all, I look at the motivation of researchers, what are they trying to get and what are they going to give us, or what's the benefit. I had one researcher call me because she wanted to interview battered women. But she kept asking me questions about why women weren't strong enough to leave. Her approach was demeaning to the women, so I didn't pursue it. Some researchers have long interview questionnaires they use which can actually cause harm to the residents of shelters. Women tell their story to these strangers because they desperately want to be heard. Then the researcher leaves and we're left with a houseful of women who feel 'unglued'. They're sad, angry, grieving and disturbed. Researchers can sometimes re-victimize these victims of domestic abuse. Even if they don't harm residents, they often don't give back anything. They 'rip off' the victims. Here's an example; recently I had this discussion with a close friend who is a feminist academic. Her students wanted to volunteer and interview people at the homeless shelter but the shelter only agreed to observation not interviews. I had to point out to her that the homeless people didn't directly benefit from the study. She said that the researchers didn't benefit either. She didn't understand that they were getting the paper, credentials and jobs from the research! You know academics and researchers need to respect the time of the people they study. I want something back for my time or the time of the victims. I'm selfish. It could be as simple as knowing my time helped someone understand the issue better or it could be a contribution toward changing public policy."

I scribbled furiously, flipping pages in my notebook to keep up with her opinions and descriptions, "Linda I'm not talking much because I'm taking notes. You have so many great observations. Next time I'll have to interview you in person and I definitely need to bring my tape recorder!"

Linda chuckled, paused and continued, "I have thirty funders and some who want to interview women at the shelter. They usually want to come for a week or two at the end of the fiscal year. It's hard to evaluate our program; they're looking for ways to justify it. Thus far, I have resisted their requests because I am concerned about the limited time women in shelter have to get their lives together-- and the limited time the funders can spend there. I'm not hiding anything but a week of interviewing won't tell the story either. It might even do damage. I run the risk of making those who give us money angry, but so far I've been able to maintain credibility and funding."

"I hope that the stories we collect and from our UCI project might help with your awareness campaigns, evaluation and even your public policy work."

"A sore point in the domestic violence field is that we don't get treated like professionals. Researchers spend a little time with us, they write the articles and books, then they are the experts who testify and give speeches. They are about us but not of us. There is a real push for credentials now, early activists are getting squeezed out. I recognize and value education and training but it's hard to be heard. In some settings I'm the token battered woman on a board or task force. I actually have two roles, as both a professional and a victim. It's too much for some of them to see me as both. Battered women have lost their voice. I have to work hard to be heard. I'm loud and noisy. I have a big voice and little fear but even some of my colleagues think I'm a bit nutty. I don't care if I'm obnoxious and loud because I'm advocating for women in

general and battered women in particular who have been silenced. Your project is all about giving us voice!"

I'm overwhelmed by her passion and her candor. I want to discuss her ideas at length but I'm staring at the kitchen clock. I have pages of notes in large scribbled script. "Voice is also very important to us in the communication department. I guess when we met we both saw each other as people who understood the sense of voice." I tried to shift to the second part of my interview questions about our meeting.

"Yes! The voice thing!" Linda laughed. "You know it was so affirming to be in a meeting where a group of women were leaning forward and really listening. It was a dialogue, not a monologue. I noticed right away that we talked to each other in stories too. In domestic violence movement we have speak outs, share stories, seek connections."

I probed, "Once you came to the meeting we connected but why did you initially decide to come to a meeting at the university to discuss a project with academic researchers?"

"Oh, I'm always hopeful -- even with academics!" We both laugh easily. "I see myself as a person who seeks connections. For a long time I've thought about the resources at the university but I haven't met many women at the university. It's almost pathetic but there's never enough time. I was interested in being a bridge with academics but I wasn't sure where to start. I hope we can work together so that we can translate what we're doing into research that both audiences can read, the academics and the community."

"So once you met us what made you decide to pursue a project together? Why were you willing to let us into your organization when you are generally so careful and protective?"

"As I said, you were very active listeners. You treated me with respect, acknowledged my expertise. You didn't act like you were doing me a favor. You gave me an audience and you

seemed to really care. Basically, you got it! That's a phrase we use all the time at CASA. We talk about people who 'get it.' Domestic violence involves women in crisis, whose lives are threatened. People need to understand and respect that, otherwise they can do harm to those we are trying to empower. So once I felt like you got it, I knew we could work together on some kind of project. As you listened, you reflected ideas back to me. When I came to the meeting I wasn't sure what kind of project might emerge. I wanted women to have a voice and I wanted stories not numbers, but I hadn't thought of the details. Then when you keyed into the idea of the CASA story of employees and volunteers who have been victims I knew we had it!"

A feeling of respect and humility surged in me. Linda was so articulate. She saw people and the process. But time was running out. "So you developed a rapport with us at the meeting. How did your directors team react when you introduced the idea to them?" I queried.

Linda chuckled, "They were suspicious, because of negative experiences. It is also one more thing for them to do, one more thing to think about. They are incredibly busy as you can imagine. We never have enough staff. They'll do it because they trust me and because they care. They know I'm the hopeful one, always ready to try something."

"At some point in the future I'd like to meet the directors' team. I've met Kelley, but not others yet. Of course, we did go to the staff meeting, which worked really well. I interviewed staff about the meeting and they were so perceptive." I made a note to myself to explore further the issue of relationships with researchers with members of the directors' team. Are their feelings from personal experience or part of Linda's philosophy? Probably both I muse. "Our time is almost up. Do you have any other thoughts about the university community initiative, or working with academics?"

"After the meeting, you called to chat, you sent email messages to me. You actually read the books I had suggested. When you asked me to be the co-principal investigator, which was important. It showed me again that you considered me a full partner. We were going to do the project *together*. You were acknowledging my expertise and allowing me to have voice in the process. It was a true connection. It just confirmed my feeling that you got it!"

CASA Staff Meeting: "You Asked Us!"

I had originally intended to write a third person narrative describing the first meeting with the staff of CASA. During an informal conversation with Shelter Coordinator, Clarissa Hersey, I was impressed by her perceptions and decided to report on the meeting by narrating our conversation, and describing the scene. This also served to privilege Clarissa's observations and reveal what she remembered as important, what had an impact on her. The staff meeting was held September 2000 and I discussed the meeting with Clarissa two months later. I asked Clarissa in advance to think about her reactions to the meeting. I sent her an email that mentioned I would like to hear any comments she had about the staff meeting. I am embarrassed to admit that I underestimated her observation skills. I expected a brief conversation about the meeting in general. Clarissa surprised me because she was acutely aware of the nuances of the meeting. Later I realized that Clarissa has honed her skills for many years, personally and professionally. Her ability to focus on the nuances of body language, tone of voice and the meanings behind the words no doubt served as survival skills during her years of childhood and marital abuse. As a survivor of abuse, a substance abuse counselor and an advocate against domestic violence, Clarissa has continued to hone these skills with a variety of support groups, shelter residents and victims of all kinds. Daily she cultivates her ability to communicate individually and in groups.

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As I park in front of the shelter I lock my map with directions in the glove compartment. I remember the importance of secrecy and how CASA would not even email directions the first time I visited. Walking past the tall wooden fence up the driveway to the shelter, I'm thinking about the rhythm. During my first visit and interview, I was concerned about respecting their time. I only planned to stay an hour but stayed three hours, chatting and joining the staff for lunch. This time I'm more prepared for the pace, which is hectic at times and almost homey at others. I understand that staff must often react to crisis situations. They juggle their time, the ups and downs, intense interactions and then unwinding. I push the doorbell and a voice over the intercom asks me to identify myself before being buzzed in through the locked door. Clarissa smiles broadly when I walk into the central work area with desks along the perimeter and a huge mauve round table in the center of the room. Clarissa radiates with her direct, efficient and ebullient personality. She is wearing her hair pulled back so her large leopard skin earrings dangle to her shoulders unrestricted. Her golden brown animal print jacket compliments her deep brown skin. As we walk toward her office, she offers me a cup of coffee. At CASA the coffee pot is always on and there are donuts on the counter.

In Clarissa's office we sit close, knees almost touching. It is a small office at the back corner of the work area crammed with filing cabinets, desk, two chairs, computer and closet. As the shelter coordinator and new supervisor promoted from within the organization, Clarissa's private office is important for her to focus on her new responsibilities. My opening comment is general, asking how things have been since my last visit. Clarissa tells me about the difficulties of being new supervisor, hiring and firing. Today Clarissa talks about her role as coordinator and supervisor of other advocates. She especially finds it problematic when dealing with

supervisory problems with women of color who she knows from the community. She freely tells me the details of her personnel challenges. I think to myself that it shows she trusts me, but I must be careful how I write about it.

"Clarissa, people are responsible for their own behaviors. When I was a supervisor I tried hard to remember it's not the supervisor's fault if they lose their job," I say empathetically, "especially if you provide coaching and support for the person."

"That's just what my supervisor, says!" Clarissa grins and I'm pleased to have reinforced her supervisor's advice. " She's a super boss who helps me learn. She's tough too! She doesn't miss a thing and she tells you about it, but I don't feel defensive. I try to really listen to what she's teaching me. I like to be out in the workroom with other advocates and helping them but sometimes she reminds me to let them handle their own problems. She says, "don't try to fix it for them."

"I know that role. Oh yes, I've been told that I'm a rescuer. It is so hard to resist but I know it doesn't really help the other person." We both laugh spontaneously and we grab each other's hands, laughing even more.

"Yes! You know just what I mean, fixer, rescuer." Clarissa seems glad I understand.

I am struck by an obvious but critical insight, "You know, I'm thinking this all relates to the power and control model that I learned at volunteer training. You try to empower women to take control of their lives."

"Yes and that's what we are trying to do with those of us who work here. You know most of us were victims, then we became survivors and now we are working for CASA. Now you remember Maxine (pseudonym) who was sitting at the staff meeting all sullen with folded arms?"

"Yes, Deb and I wondered about her silence and body language."

"It wasn't you, she was having problems with me because she was so defensive about her work. She didn't say a word the whole meeting."

A call for Clarissa interrupts our conversation and I step out of the office for a coffee refill. The pot is almost empty so I make fresh coffee. I want to look like I am a part of the group, not a guest. Although I know that I am still a visitor. I wander to the round table and scribble in my notebook, as I listen to Vicki, one of the advocates, take a crisis line call. Afterwards she turns and explains the call to me. "They often have multiple issues and we need to help them sort out the problems, before we can look at solutions. We seem to gravitate to the chocolate jar after tough calls like that one."

I wonder, did she know I was listening or did she just want to chat? "I know what you mean, I reach for chocolate as my stress relief too!"

I see the red light blink off the phone bank as Clarissa finishes her call. I hop back into Clarissa's office and say, "We were talking about the staff at meeting. I remember the woman with crossed arms because we were worried she was feeling negatively about the research project. I'm so glad it wasn't that. What do you remember about that day?"

Clarissa replies quickly. Our conversation has an easy fast-paced rhythm. "The rest of the staff was unsure but not hostile. First of all, you got past Linda so that said a lot. We know that she wouldn't let you in unless she was comfortable. You see we trust our leaders. Your project went through two levels before that staff meeting. Linda talked to the directors' team, as part of the chain. But she didn't dictate the project, just asked us to meet with you and tell us what we thought. It was significant that Kelley was here as the representative of the directors' team.

"I was glad that I saw Kelley at volunteer training. She seemed like a formidable person at the staff meeting. I didn't know the supervisors specifically but I got an idea from the looks at the table during our conversation."

"Yeah I saw you hooking Kelley. You complimented her on her training at beginning of meeting. Then throughout the meeting you would validate her training by mentioning what you learned from her. You acknowledged her role in the organization as a leader." We both chuckled and I quickly explained.

"I was sincere but I could tell she needed to be persuaded. Her stories about researchers sounded just like Linda. I could see everyone looking at her, deferring to her."

"You got that right! Her arms were definitely crossed at beginning of meeting. But when she cosigned, the others began to talk. Oh and I noticed you used her name. You called each of us by name I think. You never got defensive when you answered Kelley's pointed questions. You didn't change the tone of your voice throughout the meeting, except to laugh. You and Deb both laughed. You weren't cocky or tense or formal. You were relaxed and not rushed. Deb took lots of notes and you talked more than you wrote. You watched people, really looked at them and you seemed to listen so intently. You acknowledged people who spoke and at one point you told us what you had written, like a summary."

Clarissa continued, on roll now…"One key to that meeting was when you told us about your friends who had been abused and you cried. Then we saw you as a person, not a researcher. You were someone with feelings."

I feel touched by Clarissa's memories and insights about the meeting. I explained, "I was surprised by my tears but you had the Kleenex ready."

"It's that kind of place," Clarissa paused, and then continued. "You know what was the thing that closed the bond, the super glue to the whole thing! You said, 'We want to learn about you. We want you to tell us how we can learn about what's its like to work against domestic violence, what its like to volunteer. Wow! We weren't used to that approach so then we all started talking."

"And I noticed that the staff was pleased we would be volunteering, and that we would be splitting up, working on different days," I commented. I was thinking how effective it was to prepare questions in advance and review the informal agenda with Deb. It worked!

"Yes, it meant you would be spending lots of time with us and it's easier to talk to you individually. Deb is so vibrant and she works so hard, with no attitude. She cleaned the closet, stocked pantry, went to the store. Deb eats lunch with us and acts like one of us. She fits in because she doesn't act like she knows it all."

I felt a bit defensive since I hadn't volunteered yet. I was writing the grant first and everyone had agreed that was the best use of my time initially. "I was wondering when Nina was going to put me to work, grants or whatever, maybe Christmas sorting."

Clarissa interrupts, "Yeah when I saw you were going to be doing Christmas work I was impressed. That's hard and it's a time when volunteers are busy at home."

"I was thinking of maybe helping with crisis line. Judy said it was hard to get volunteers to try that. I know I would need lots of training, but I'll do anything you want…"

I was encouraged when Clarissa responded, "Oh, you could do it!"

Bonnie peeks in the door, "We're ordering lunch, and you want anything?"

We place our order and I ask Clarissa, "Anything else you want to add?"

"Well at the end of the meeting, after you left we discussed it with Kelley, and agreed to the project. Later we talked about it in the advocates' team and people said it made them feel really special. Really special," she emphasized as she smiled widely, staring right into my eyes. Her eyes sparkled and conveyed a deep message. "Most people are interested in victims. We listen to their stories but we don't get the opportunity to share ourselves. We'll get things out that we don't normally have chance to discuss. And we know the value of sharing --- it's a process of validation. This work changes you. I think it was God's plan for me to go through what I did so I could come to this point. It takes a strong person, and strong families -- and even stronger men to deal with us too, " We both laughed. There was so much left unsaid but after a few months I felt that I had come to understand what she meant without explanation.

"I'm going to make a note to follow up on that. I'll tell you how God led me here too. And maybe someday we can talk about families. In a couple of months I'd like to meet some family members, if they want to talk or you feel OK about it."

Clarissa nodded her head but looked a bit surprised but then we were interrupted for lunchtime.

University Partners' Motivations

After my conversations with the community partners I scheduled interviews to probe more deeply into why the academic partners pursued the project. I felt somewhat awkward interviewing the academic partners. With my professor, I was nervous because I was going to interview 'the expert,' but I didn't want to be nervous. I just didn't feel as prepared as usual because the day had been hectic. I just wasn't feeling centered. As we talked I felt that we experienced several special moments of coming together.

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Intriguing and Rare

Carolyn smiled broadly, greeting me as I poked my head into her office. She waved her hands across the piles of papers on her floor, "Watch your step."

"Don't worry I have the same filing system, "I chuckled as I sat down and set up my tape recorder. Carolyn pulled out the bottom drawer of her desk and propped up her feet. "I think the research you're doing is unique and so important because how many people stop at this point in the research project to capture these processes? Not many! And you're capturing them as we go along with them and so it's going to be a dynamite project."

I momentarily reflect on Carolyn's affirming comments. "Capturing it as we go along may affect the process, helping the group to reflect on what we're doing. Clarissa and I have a certain understanding that we might not have had if we hadn't stopped to capture the process this morning."

"I hear of some projects and I wonder if the academics are really connecting with the community. There doesn't seem to be much reflection on process or the community's voice. It looks like the academics just want to come in and fix things, solve the problem, find the answer. You know what I mean!" Carolyn gave me a look with a grimace.

I was eager to share my morning interview with Carolyn, "Clarissa and I were just talking about being fixers or rescuers. It is common problem in organizations, but the CASA philosophy relies on encouraging women to take responsibility and empowering the residents and employees. They really understand the dynamics of power and control." I was getting excited as I saw the theme emerging. "They also value and privilege people's voices. Speaking of voices, I want to get yours on why you chose to participate in the project."

"When it came across my desk I thought, 'Well this is intriguing,' because I know how rare it is for a community organization to approach us with something that we would want to do. And I was hooked because they wanted to tell the stories of abused women. I've almost gotten involved in projects in the community before – people call me and they want evaluation research, they want some numbers and then I'm thinking, 'Spare me, life's too short.' I've also been intrigued by the topic of abuse, mostly with students like Penny who have written about abuse. It's an epiphanal experience for people. Their life changes. It's a process of human relationships. So I thought, 'Well this is interesting and if I didn't already have a life full of deadlines then I'd really like to do this.' I was almost going to let it pass and then I thought, 'Well no, just throw a note out on the email to a couple people to see if anybody's interested.' I doubted anybody would respond. . You and Deb already had other projects and Penny didn't want to come back to school. It was bad timing so I was surprised when you all responded."

"What made you think of us?" I was sincerely curious about her selections.

"Because you were mature women who I thought would be able to do this kind of project and you had kind, caring personalities. I only sent it to people who really care," Carolyn's voice became gentle.

I shifted the focus a bit, "Marcie also did a good job of thinking who on campus does work like CASA wants, and making that match, getting you intrigued."

"Until the last year or two, nobody else on campus knew what I was doing, really. And what I do is so far removed from them that I was pleased somebody in psychology realized it was a good fit. I've kept myself very isolated in the university on purpose, because if you spread out then you just get more jobs to do. So I do minimal university service or committee work where I would meet other people in the university. It's because you can't do it all and I've

decided that that's not where I'm going to concentrate. I don't really like that stuff anyway. Participating in the Clemente Program has connected me to some university people and to the community.

"The other reason for my interests in this research project relates to my hope for the future of autoethnography as the type of research that we could spread into the community and the hands of people who could actually use it (Ellis & Bochner, 200). I've wanted to give articles to med students, social workers and advocates so that they could see that academic writing can be evocative, take you into the world of the clientele and offer new perspectives or understanding. This project was an opportunity to make that happen."

"It all came together didn't it? I summarized.

"Once you and Deb were really intrigued I felt I could set this up so that I wasn't doing it all. Then I was very willing. It was very clear from the first moment that you were going to take charge of it, which is exactly what I wanted."

"You made that very clear. I mean the easy thing about working with you is that if there's something that's important to you then you make it clear. Otherwise you encourage students to take a risk. I really appreciate your trust, support, and time on this project. The proposal is in your name and it reflects on you, so your trust means a lot. Now I have one other thought about our decision to work with CASA. Informally during our chats you have mentioned Linda's impact. "

"Yeah, I liked the way she looked, I liked the way she dressed, I liked the way she sat in the chair, I liked the way she entered the room and, of course, I already knew what she had said about stories. I just very quickly – and sometimes you can be wrong when you make those quick judgments -- trusted her and decided that we were made out of the same cloth. She didn't know

it yet because she didn't think academics could understand things, but she and I were similar. We had a lot in common."

"That's great! I really felt the same way. I thought that we both shared the experience of being visionary kind of executive directors for non-profit organizations. Linda was so articulate, so incredibly articulate. She was also an English major like me, which I found out later. The way she used words drew me to her, she said so much with so few words. Linda would say something about women and the court only hearing part of the story but there was sort of a vast panoramic picture of meaning behind it."

"Yes! I responded to the words too. I thought, 'Ah hah, oh yes, of course I see that!' The courts only wanted to hear one piece of the story, period, but she complexified that by asking. Why do we only want to hear one piece of the story? "What do we do with it? What is at risk here? She exploded the whole idea out of the water and she hooked me with that." Carolyn's speech was excited and she was leaning toward me as she spoke.

"Yes. She made us think and she just looked at things from a different lens. As you know I was unsure of changing my project but I respected her message and the way she presented her message. I felt her magnetism and her ability to speak passionately." As I finished speaking I thought about discussing Linda's view of leadership with her later. I closed my notebook and stopped the tape recorder. "You want to hear about some of my interview with Deb?" I asked Carolyn. She glances at the clock and nods her head smiling.

Looking Like Researchers

Deb and I have been colleagues for over a year of graduate school and we have become friends. Yet I felt awkward interviewing her. Even with interactive interview format the setting was more formalized than usual. As the researcher I felt a slight sense of power not typical of

our relationship. In addition this project was important because it was potentially the beginning of a new relationship for us as research assistants in the same site.

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Deb and I settle at the breakfast table with steaming cups of coffee and banana nut bread. "What I'm writing about is process – instead of waiting until later and looking back at the project. So how did you feel when you got the email from Carolyn? What were you thinking?

"Forgive me, refresh my memory. What email are you talking about?" Deb frowned in thought as she took another bite of the warm bread.

I flipped open my notebook with copies of email messages. "Carolyn sent us an email that said, 'Are any of you interested, or do you know a very sensitive graduate student who might want to be involved in getting life stories from women who have been abused and who are in an abuse shelter? I have this wonderful opportunity but I can't do it myself.' "

Deb shook her head, "Yeah, yeah, right!" She paused to think, "I was very flattered that she chose to include me, honored and very excited after struggling with Guardian Ad Litem approval. The thought of having a research project where I had full institutional support was very attractive to me. I was also a little worried because I had already committed to research at Museum of Science and Industry. I had no idea that the CASA opportunity would be coming along. Quite frankly, I was tempted to say no because I was so swamped, so busy and so overwhelmed. Remember, I had all those health problems too."

"I had the same problem because I was already committed to the project on narrative inquiry seminars for leaders. The seminars had been approved by the board of directors, scheduled and publicized. Carolyn knew about our projects but Marcie didn't know we were unsure of our commitment. We had different assumptions. Do you remember when we were getting ready to go to the meeting?"

Deb gulped her coffee, "We were all dressed real spiffy. We all complimented each other on how we were dressed. We were little pumpkins following Carolyn, the great pumpkin." Deb and I chuckled at the image. "I vividly remember walking over through the breezeway and outside. I remember thinking to myself that Carolyn seemed to be walking fast. I felt like I was trotting to try to keep up with her and I thought to myself, 'What a funny analogy because we are kind of trotting to always keep up with her, following in her footsteps.'

I probed, "Do you think we dressed up because we wanted to look like researchers?"

"I dressed up because I knew that we would be meeting people from outside our department and from the community so I wanted to present a different image from my normal image," Deb explained.

"We wanted to look like somebody they would trust, credible not like grungy students." I clowned. "Clean clothes is my goal as a grad student!"

"Right. I feel when you're representing the university you need to dress, act and talk a certain way. That's kind of foreign for the way I am, but I can play that game," Deb responded.

"Well I had a hard time dressing and I'm so glad that you and Carolyn did too. But I think Linda also dressed for us. So what do you remember about the meeting?" I'm aware of the taping time and transcribing so I keep pressing forward.

" The meeting had a very invitational tone to it but I was very nervous because they would ask questions and Carolyn would look at us like we were supposed to answer, which we often did. I didn't want to presume to speak for Carolyn, since she's the authority. But then when Carolyn looked at me, I felt on the spot to talk. I wanted to impress upon Linda that we were professional but also sensitive to what she wanted. I was really nervous at the whole

meeting. I don't remember when we started talking about the grant. Did we start talking about the grant at that meeting?"

I rolled my eyes at Deb, "Yes!, that's why we were there."

"See, I don't remember that part at all. I remember they had the idea for the collaboration and all that, but I couldn't remember if we mentioned the grant or how it came about. I was too nervous and worried about my self-presentation to really be aware of a lot of those dynamics. And I was really worried about phrasing things in a certain way and not cussing. You know, really trying to control my vocabulary and body language, so my attention was going to self-maintenance."

I asked, "What was your overall impression of Linda?"

"I remember that I thought she was really pretty," Deb said immediately. I was touched by the genuineness of her comment. Deb isn't usually someone who focuses on looks. She continued, "Her eyes are really beautiful. I remember thinking that I was really surprised she had white hair"

"I remember the turquoise blouse and her cream colored pant suit, with a the turquoise pin on the jacket lapel. My previous job would have led me to dress just like Linda, in a suit, but not an uptight suit. I felt too awkward to be in that uniform in the academic community so I compromised on the business casual look. In the past I would wear the beige, brown or navy suit, but I would always wear a bright colored blouse and a unique pin to send the message: 'I'm wearing the suit because I'm supposed to wear it, but I'm really not a traditional person.' I have no idea if that's what Linda thinks. I saw someone in the uniform but someone who was spunky. When we heard her talk I was really taken with her language."

"I liked a lot of the things that she said. To me it was clear this woman was an activist who has been an activist since the sixties. I am always very interested to find the old hippies who didn't sell out. So many of the people who I went to high school with had all these idealistic goals. Now when I go to high school reunions they've become materialistic. Why didn't that happen to me? I perceived Linda as someone from the sixties who hadn't sold out. She is still working in a service area and doing something to benefit others."

I agreed with Deb, "She did appear to be someone who deeply cared. And her language was of caring. And I guess, ultimately, the way she described caring, the way she seemed to think about people as well as policy, I mean she put it all together and just was so articulate."

"Not just privileging a narrative methodology, but also the victims' and their stories. I think she's the one who said, 'They tell pieces of their stories all the time but they never get to tell the whole story'."

"So that one meeting gave you a sense of the project and the person."

"And now it has been interesting to see her in a more official role at CASA. She's different. She's got to be the boss. I've seen different Lindas. I bet she'd be a lot of fun to see socially. I like her."

"I'm going to look at the supervisory relationships later in the year, some examples have already emerged at the shelter. By the way Deb, the women at the shelter really love you,. We were talking about how they remembered the staff meeting and what they thought of us. They were impressed because you worked so hard and weren't arrogant." Deb smiled when I shared the compliments. "Any other final thoughts?"

"I feel bad now. I feel like I should have paid closer attention. I knew you were going to write about the process for Carolyn's class and it was in the grant proposal. I just don't

remember a lot. I remember certain things, like I said, but I don't remember it in so much detail like you remember it."

"I think that's because the process is less important to you. You are the doer," I replied

"Probably. That was my big hang-up in the narrative class, memory, time, and temporality. I want to just get on with it," Deb agreed.

"Well and the funny thing about working together is that I want to watch all these nuances and mull them over a little bit. On one hand we're good together but sometimes we have very different rhythms. Sometimes I wish I could just get on with it. But I've been aware of process for years in my roles with other organizations. Now I'm trying to understand the academic environment. Anyway, this paper is about our first impressions and decision to participate in the university community initiative. The next paper will focus even more on process, the meetings, decisions and activities so you can aim for the next phase."

Final Reflections

I think my voice is included in the interviews I have presented here but in my final reflections I ask myself, "Why did I choose to participate in this project?" The day before I received an email message inviting me to the initial project meeting, I spent an hour meditating on being open to new experiences. I was trying to resist the urge to stay safe and continue the same work I had done for years. I was trying to cleanse my mind of the confusion surrounding my research goals. I was hoping that I could clear my mind in order to be receptive to new ideas. When I read the email message I felt like an answer had come, but I was still hesitant about my qualifications to pursue this topic. After meeting the executive director I was drawn to her charismatic voice and intrigued by the possibilities. I still felt uncertain so I called several friends to discuss my change in focus. Their stories made the difference in my decision.

"He put a knife to my neck and that's when I finally decided it was time to leave him," my friend Yvonne told me with no emotion in her voice.

I gripped the phone tighter. Her disclosure chilled my body. "You never told me," I replied softly. I don't think I was shocked that she had been a victim, or was I? I know that I was shocked she hadn't confided in me.

"I just couldn't," Yvonne's voice became a whisper, "I was so ashamed." I felt ashamed that somehow I didn't know about her pain, that she didn't feel she could tell me. I was confused but angry that the victim was still the one who felt blamed.

When I told another friend, Wanda, about the potential class project with the women's shelter, I didn't tell her about Yvonne. There was a pause on the phone line, and then Wanda tried to act casual when she told me "I was abused for nine years in my first marriage, before I met you."

"Nine years? But you never mentioned it," I stammered thinking of all our late night conversation and confidences. I even remembered sharing ex-husband jokes.

"Well, it was in the past," she replied. " And silence is a habit in the military. Imagine a drill sergeant who demands obedience at home too. But things are different for me now. Part of me wants to forget but another part of me wants to remember. If you decide to work with the shelter it will be incredibly rough for you emotionally. I know -- I volunteered for several years. Seemed like many of those working there were survivors."

My sister's response to the idea was quite different. "You know how you get when you are on your soapbox. You'll be angry all the time."

"Maybe we should be angry," I retorted! "If it happens to one woman, it happens to us all. I am mad already! Most of all I'm so sad, almost sick, that my friends were ashamed. They were the victims!"

My sister paused and then admitted, "I guess I was just worried that you wouldn't be safe if you're working there. But that's the point. Right?

These stories helped me decide that I wanted to help women everywhere whose voices are silenced. I am in awe of their strength. I am deeply saddened by their experiences.

I have been involved in cooperative, collaborative and community projects for thirty years but the journey continues as I learn more about engaged scholarship between the university and community organizations. I initially thought I would write about power and collaboration but the themes of trust and listening became more important. It was about becoming partners. Many of the ideas presented may seem simple or obvious, but the stories show that researchers need to remember and practice these ideas.

Community partners want researchers to listen, to hear their voices, ask their opinions about research design and be willing to understand the context. Community members want researchers to respect their expertise. A partnership is not about analyzing patterns or using academic knowledge to fix a problem for a community organization. A partnership is a relationship that involves time and trust. In the university community partnership with CASA these issues are particularly important. Domestic violence focuses on issues of control and power. Those who work against domestic violence value the sense of empowerment and giving voice to those who are silenced. The university community project with CASA came together because we shared those values. We saw ways to help each other make our work meaningful.

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